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## MORALS AND MANNERS.

G. A. JOHNSTON.

WITHIN the last few years our newspapers and periodicals have contained, with increasing frequency, references to the present-day decay of manners. That this decline in courtesy is real cannot be denied. Certainly many of its manifestations which were common a generation ago are now as extinct as the Great Auk. Nobody deeply regrets that the Great Auk is extinct. No doubt it was an interesting bird, but it was of no particular value or significance. The popular attitude towards the imminent extinction of manners is closely similar to this. Manners, it is thought, are very nice in their own way, and good for people with plenty of leisure, like *les précieuses de l'Hotel Rambouillet* and *l'entourage de Louis Quatorze*, but an anachronism in these days of "quick lunches" and "get on or get out." But on the contrary, the truth would seem to be that the decay of manners, if there be a decay, so far from being merely an episode (comic or tragic) in the drama of human history, is as serious and ominous a portent as a decline in morals. I shall try to show that the popular antithesis between morals and manners is mistaken, and that not a single principle of distinction between them is valid, and not a single line of demarcation will bear examination. Manners form a special and most important department of morals, and thus any decay of manners really amounts to moral degeneration.

This view may at first appear startling and almost paradoxical. The plain man cherishes the distinction between manners and morals. Morals, he believes, are of the heart, manners are only skin-deep. Morality is the expression of a man's inmost character, courtesy a superficial veneer. Morals are natural, manners artificial. Morals are spontaneous, manners petrified. Morals are honest and

straightforward, manners deceitful and sinuous. The popular mind delights in such contrasts as that in "The Cloister and the Hearth" between the rough, unmannerly German who sells good shoes and the smooth, polite Frenchman who sells bad shoes.

But this sharp differentiation of morals from manners is really one of those unexamined assumptions which infect all our thinking with error. If we take any province of ordinary experience, we find that it consists of opinions adopted we know not when nor how nor why. We do not question these assumptions: often we do not understand them. They form the mental and moral *Gemeingut* of our age. It is one of the tasks of reflective thought to examine these presuppositions. Socrates with his confession of ignorance and his Maieutic Art, Descartes with his method of universal doubt—these are typical of the effort of philosophy to test on the touchstone of reflection the opinions and prejudices of ordinary experience.

Before proceeding to examine critically the popular prejudice that there is an ultimate difference between morals and manners, we may conveniently notice a preliminary objection to the view which we have suggested. Surely, it may be said, you don't deny that a good man may have bad manners, and a bad man good manners. Is it not a fact of everyday experience that the most honest men are often the most unpolished? On the other hand, it is a truism that your thorough rogue often has perfect manners. With the poets, from Virgil and Horace downwards, it is a commonplace that the city unites politeness and rascality, and the country combines boorishness and honesty. Again, everybody knows that Mr. A eats peas with a knife, but is in great demand as a trustee; while Mr. B would embezzle your money, but would be unhappy for a day if he cut you in the street. How can you, it may be said, run in the face of all this, and say that morals and manners are the same?

In reply to this popular objection, we would point out that our view implies that all manners are morals, but

not that all morals are manners. Manners constitute a special department of morals. No man is altogether good. He may be good with reference to one department of morality and bad with reference to another. Morality involves exceedingly numerous sets of relations between persons in different circumstances and in different connections. Such is the complexity of human experience that it is often the case that a man is good in one department of morality and bad in other departments. We call a man "good" *simpliciter*, because on the whole, considering all the departments of morality, he is more good than bad. Because a man is good in the department of family-morality and bad in the department of commercial morality, nobody would dream of asserting that one of these departments ought to fall outside the realm of morality. The proper conclusion is that the man is good *qua* family-man, and bad *qua* commercial-man. So it is illogical to state that because a man may be good in some particular department of morality without being good so far as manners go, therefore manners cannot form a part of morals.

We must now pass on to investigate the grounds on which not only common sense but also reflective thought has endeavoured to distinguish between morals and manners. It is clear that the whole question of the relation of morals and manners depends on the meaning of morality. If we assert that manners fall within the realm of morality, we must state clearly what we mean by morality. What characteristics distinguish those parts of experience and those facts of life which we call moral from others? There is general agreement that the science which deals with morality has as its subject-matter conduct. Ethics treats of conduct, *mores*, ἠθῆ, *mœurs*, *Sitten*. Now every one of these words covers what we currently call "manners." By the Greeks and Romans what we name "morals" and "manners" were not carefully distinguished. Certain types of conduct were more ceremonial than others, but in so far as they did not occur at random and haphazard, but were the expression of a formed disposition or charac-

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ter, they could be called "ethical" or "moral." And every translator knows how difficult it is to get one English word to render *Mœurs* and *Sitten*. They include both manners and morals. The English language, alone among important philosophical languages, excludes manners from morals.<sup>1</sup>

But the mere fact that the most important philosophical languages use the same word for manners and morals does not prove that there is no distinction between them. There are many real distinctions in the world which language does not reflect. It is thus *prima facie* possible that manners and morals are ultimately different. To determine the question it is necessary to analyse the conception of conduct. This examination reveals the existence of three main characteristics of conduct.

(1) Conduct involves consciousness. It involves more: it involves self-consciousness. In conduct we must be capable of having an idea of ourselves as acting. Thus from conduct we should probably exclude the actions of animals. They are certainly conscious acts, but they are probably not self-conscious acts. The animal does not have an idea of itself as acting. Do manners involve self-consciousness? An attempt to exclude manners from conduct may be made on the ground that good manners can never be self-conscious. Self-consciousness mars the naturalness of true courtesy. But this objection rests on an ambiguity in the word "self-consciousness." Self-consciousness in the philosophical sense, the sense in which we used it in speaking of conduct, refers to that stage of reflective rationality which in the process of evolution

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<sup>1</sup> Even in English, the word manners was not always restricted to its present narrow sense. Bacon, *e.g.*, regularly employs it where modern usage would prefer "morals." *E.g.*, "As touching the manners of learned men, it is a thing personal and individual; and no doubt there be among them, as in other professions, of all temperatures; but yet so as it is not without truth which is said, *abeunt studia in mores*." (Advancement of Learning, p. 51.) And even as late as 1721, when Berkeley writes to Percival about his Bermuda scheme, he says its object is the "reformation of manners amongst the English in our Western Plantations."

has been attained only by man. On the other hand, self-consciousness in common parlance, in the sense in which this objection employs it, means excessive or morbid awareness of one's own existence in the presence of others. Good manners exclude self-consciousness in this sense, but not in the philosophical sense. Manners are possible only at the self-conscious or reflective stage. In this aspect, morals certainly include manners.

(2) All conduct implies some end; to this end all actions are purposively directed. In all moral acts, some purpose to be realised must be present explicitly or implicitly. "Implicitly," we add, for there are many habitual actions which are not consciously directed to any end. If we reflected on them, we would be aware of the end to which they were directed. But we do not usually reflect on habitual actions. In them the purpose is only implicitly present. But we do not deny to these habitual actions the name of conduct. It is clear that on this count also the acts of animals are rightly excluded from conduct. Experiments with animals tend to show that they are not capable of representing an end to themselves, and purposively directing their acts towards its attainment.<sup>2</sup> In the case of animals, we cannot even say that an end is implicitly present. The acts of animals are instinctive and impulsive, and not habitual. What then are we to say of manners? Are they, like the acts of animals, to be excluded from conduct? It seems clear that they should not. Manners may be directed to some end. They involve intention and meaning. It is true that manners as we see them crystallised in ceremonial observance are habitual. They are ways of acting which have become petrified, and in general the ends to which they are directed are not reflectively present. But all manners in their origin are significant, and are directed purposively towards the attainment of some end, though through the influence of habit and tradition that end often becomes obscured.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. J. Cornish: "Animals at Work and Play," and W. Mills: "The Nature and Development of Animal Intelligence."

(3) All conduct is the expression of character. Conduct is a general name for an aggregate of isolated acts: character has a certain permanence and stability. Conduct springs only from character, and character manifests itself only in conduct. From what was said about animals in the last paragraph, it follows that they have no character. Can we say that manners, like the rest of conduct, are an expression of character? Yes, and in precisely the same sense. Manners are a most important form of self-expression. We commonly speak of a man "giving himself away" by some *faux pas*. A mannerly action in the abstract, like a moral action in the abstract, is a blank cheque. It has no value till it is filled in. All mannerly actions and all moral actions owe their peculiar tints, shades, tones, nuances to the character which performs and informs them. Take the simplest examples. The gift of a cup of cold water may be the grudging act of a shallow character, or it may be suffused with all the glow and warmth of a great soul. In each case the action is moral, and in each case it is an expression of character. It owes its colour to the character of which it is a manifestation. Or take a mannerly action. A man of ordinary courtesy, after pulling down the window to open the door on leaving the compartment of a railway train, will pull it up again before shutting the door. But there is all the difference in the world between the ways in which the act is done. The act is coloured by the character of the man. Manners, quite as much as morals in the narrow sense, bear the impress of the character from which they issue.

From this analysis of the subject-matter of ethics, it is clear that it is impossible to extrude manners from the purview of that science. The consideration of conduct in its main implications has revealed no single principle by which we can differentiate manners from morals.

So far, our argument has implied no special view of the nature of ethics, and it may be well to point out that whatever be the type of ethical theory to which we incline,

the results already established will still hold good. The various moral theories differ from one another mainly on the question of the nature of the ground of moral approbation. (a) It may be held that approbation rests on a sentiment or feeling of some kind. This is the view of Hume and in more recent times of Meinong. (b) Or approbation may be based on the usefulness or pleasantness of the action approved. Varieties of this view have been maintained by Hedonists and Utilitarians. (c) The prevailing Anglo-Hegelian view is that the goodness of actions depends solely upon motive, and that the end of action is self-realisation. We are not here concerned with the question which of these theories is the true one. None may be true. But they represent the main types of ethical theory, and it can be shown that all of them apply to manners as well as to morals in the narrow sense. Thus the same considerations which led Hume to hold that our approbation of a moral action is based on sentiment induced him to believe that our approval of a mannerly action is similarly grounded. Again, if the usefulness or pleasantness of actions constitute goodness, this criterion will apply to manners as well as to morals. It is none the less certain, though it is not so clear, that on the last theory, also, manners fall under the same category as morals. The goodness of a moral action depends on the motive. It is equally true that the value of a mannerly action depends on motive. The motive means the end before the mind of the agent. The theory with which we are now concerned says that this determines the moral value of the action. The motive need not be consciously present to the mind of the agent. In habitual actions it is not so present. Most mannerly actions are habitual, but in their origin they involved some end. Some end and motive may be said to be implicitly present in every mannerly action. (Sometimes in manners the motive may be explicitly present. Two courteous acts precisely the same externally may be actuated by very different motives. One need only instance the mannerly action of Judas in

saluting his Master with a kiss.) So far, then, as these typical theories of ethics are concerned, there is no reason why we should resile from our view that manners constitute a department of morals.

This may also be supported along two other lines of argument. In our analysis of conduct, we decided that the term could not strictly be applied to the actions of animals. Having made that clear, we may now point out, not only that in animals' actions there are interesting analogues of conduct, but also that in these approximations to conduct it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the roots of morals from those of manners. The process of evolution towards morals and manners is seen most clearly in the sex-relationship, because both manners and morals involve, in general, a relation; and the most rudimentary relation is that of sex. Many of these actions are certainly adumbrations of what at the human level we should call manners or morals. In many cases it is impossible to say whether the analogy is more to morals or to manners. For example, is the elaborate display of the male rainbow-fish of the Ganges, so charmingly described by Carbonnier, not quite as much an analogue of manners as of morals? Again, in the flashing love-lights of the Italian glow-insect (*luciola*), where the rapid staccato flashes of the male harmonise with the longer tremulous glow of the female, it is surely not fanciful to see an anticipation of courtesy as well as of mere sexual attraction. A sceptic indeed he would be who would refuse to see both morals and manners implicated in the action of the female of a certain species of lamellicorn beetle (*lethrus cephalotes*), in resenting violently the entry of any male but her mate into the cavity which they inhabit.

Among the lowest types of savages, conduct has already become explicit, and already has begun a rudimentary differentiation of morality into different departments, sexual morality, ceremonial morality, religious morality, and so on. But in general among savages the various departments of morality are always tending to coalesce.

The intimate and confused relation of ceremonial, religious and sexual morality in a rudimentary state of civilisation is well exemplified in the case of such a tribe as the strange South Indian people, the Todas.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps at this level it would be more correct to say that morals are a branch of manners than that manners are a branch of morals. At this stage morality is based on imitation rather than reflection. "What is customary is right" is the ultimate moral judgment of the savage. Ceremonial morality is the most comprehensive form of morality, and other types are sub-forms of that. At this level, morality consists in imitation, and moral progress in what Tarde has called "cross-fertilisation of imitations."

This brief survey of some factors in evolution just above and just below the source of explicit manners and morals has suggested that their origin was simultaneous, and that the roots from which they spring are the same. But in saying this, we must be careful to avoid a gross error. Running through the last two paragraphs is a *suggestio falsi* which is characteristic of a good deal of anthropological and sociological work. This sociologist's fallacy is found in the argument that because two things are found conjoined at an early stage of evolution, therefore they must not be distinguished at a later stage. Our argument is, I think, free from this fallacy. We analysed first morals and manners, as we find them existing at present. There we could discover no real ground of distinction between them. To biology and anthropology we turned, not for proof, but merely for interesting corroboratory evidence.

It may be interesting also to mention that, in general, by ancient and mediæval thought, manners and morals were not sharply distinguished. Plato, for example, *totus teres atque rotundus* in his ethical views, did not separate them. The undifferentiated unity of both is his ideal. In this Plato is the truest expression, as the great man always is, of his age and civilisation. Interesting it is also to note

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<sup>3</sup> See W. H. R. Rivers: "The Todas."

that the mediæval church, with all its passion for distinctions, did not sharply separate morals and manners. The official formulation of the seven deadly sins—pride, avarice, luxury, sloth, envy, gluttony, anger—covers much that comes under the rubric of manners. For the mediæval church, the important thing was sin, and an unmannerly action might be much more sinful than one in the narrow sense immoral. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is rather a breach of good manners than an offence against morality. This position with regard to manners and morals was deeply ingrained in scholastic philosophy, so much so that even in the *Ethica* of the Belgian Cartesian Geulinx, who broke away from scholasticism on most points, we find the intimate implication of morals and manners. And his interesting *Disputationes Ethicæ* contain much that belongs to manners rather than to morality.

From these illustrative and auxiliary lines of argument we must now pass to one or two serious difficulties.

(I) It may be urged against our position that while it is true that the attitude adopted to both morals and manners is one of approval or disapproval, the nature of the approval differs in the two cases. In one case we have moral approval, in the other æsthetic approval. The judgment on morals is a moral judgment, the judgment on manners an æsthetic judgment. It is, of course, clear that these types of judgment do differ. In the history of thought, it was the great error of Shaftesbury and also of Hume that they failed to recognise the difference. The most important ground of distinction is that the æsthetic judgment rests upon feeling only, which is subjective and private, while the moral judgment lays claim to such characteristics as universality and objectivity, which are impossible unless the judgment is based on reason. The æsthetic judgment says "I like you, and I don't know why." It depends on a private preference for what is conceived to be beautiful, and is guided by feeling only. But the moral judgment rests on reason. Its decisions can be defended against the appeals of sentiment by reasons

which are universally convincing. Is then the judgment we pass on manners moral or æsthetic? There can be no doubt, I think, that it is a moral judgment; but at the same time it seems clear that it implies also an æsthetic element which is absent from the judgments we pass on actions in other departments of morality. In making a judgment on a man's commercial morality, for instance, the æsthetic beauty or ugliness of the action, if it possesses these qualities, is quite irrelevant to the judgment. And our feeling-attitude towards the man or his action is more likely to distort our judgment than to corroborate it. But in judging of manners or ceremonial morality, the æsthetic element is present. The feeling-attitude for what is beautiful in manners must be taken into account in our judgments on them. Good manners are not only morally right, but also æsthetically beautiful. Now so long as the decisions of the moral and of the æsthetic sense agree, it may be difficult to tell whether the resultant judgment is chiefly moral or æsthetic. To decide the question, it is necessary to examine those cases in which the moral and æsthetic judgments differ in their verdicts. These cases are of frequent occurrence. Many things are æsthetically beautiful which morality condemns, and many things which are morally admirable leave the æsthetic sense cold and contemptuous. An apparently mannerly action may be applauded by the æsthetic sense, only to be condemned by morality. In such a case the moral judgment is supreme, and its sentence must be sustained. Morality, as Aristotle said, is architectonic, and all other judgments on action are ancillary to it. The judgment on manners is ultimately moral.

(II) A further objection to our view may be pressed. It may be said that while morals are spontaneous, manners are petrified; while morals are rational, manners are traditional; while morals are universal, manners have only local or sectional validity. In a general way, this objection has been answered by the whole argument of this paper.

But two aspects of it are important enough to merit more particular consideration.

The harsh antithesis between the traditional authority of manners and the spontaneous rationality of morals rests on certain facts and implies a certain theory. It points on the one hand to the fossilisation or crystallisation of custom and ceremonial, and on the other to the exuberant and effervescent freedom of morality. But the facts in the two cases are not parallel. In the first case, the reference is to the actual rules laid down by custom; in the second, to the self-legislating spirit of the free man. When we speak of the petrification of manners, we are thinking of the meticulous regulations in which the spirit of courtesy is often confined. When we speak of the vitality of morality, we deliberately close our eyes to the galling restraints and restrictions of moral rules. But the spirit of courtesy is as free and self-determining as that of morality. The spirit of morality and the spirit of courtesy are alike free and spontaneous, though the rules which they lay down are rigid. If casuistry be a genuine science, it will apply in the realm of ceremonial morality, as in all other departments of the moral life. Such a science will employ rules of conduct, but it will not cabin or confine the free spirit of morality. To the whole moral realm, including the department of manners, we may apply Dr. Johnson's canon of artistic criticism, which Fanny Burney has preserved. "There are three distinct kinds of judges: the first are those who know no rules, but pronounce entirely from their natural taste and feelings; the second are those who know and judge by rules; and the third are those who know but are above the rules." In morals and manners alike, the highest class is the third. A man should know the laws of morality and the regulations of courtesy; but he should also be above those rules. He should be informed by the *spirit* of morality.

The objection which we are now considering also suggests that while morals have a certain universality, manners are particular, differing among different classes and in

different localities. There is a general agreement, it may be said, on matters of morality; but there is no such agreement with regard to social regulations and rules of honour. It must be admitted at once that this is a real distinction, though it is a distinction only of degree. It is, of course, obvious that the manners of farm labourers differ from those of professional men, but a similar difference also exists between their standards of sexual morality. Again, the courtesy of France differs from that of America, but the two countries also diverge widely in their standards of commercial morality. And no one who has surveyed the range of facts collected in such a book as Westermarck's *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* will attempt to deny that among savage tribes there is quite as much diversity in morals as in manners.

All that has been said supports the view that it is impossible to exclude manners from the realm of morality, though within that realm there are many departments of morality and many degrees of moral good. In general, an offence against courtesy involves less moral guilt than a fault in any other department of morality. This principle may be illustrated in numerical terms by the provision in the Salic Law that he who calls a freeborn man a fox is fined three solidi, while any one who libels a freeborn woman a harlot is mulcted in 188 solidi.<sup>4</sup> And we somehow feel that there is a lack of moral balance in a community which regards the refusal to fight a duel as more immoral than bigamy. Yet while every moralist would probably agree that breaches of ceremonial morality are less heinous than offences against, say, commercial morality, it is worth noting that a community is often cut to the quick by offences against a code of manners, though transgressions in morals leave it cold. Jesus was crucified because, though people could not lay a finger on a single moral offence, they were exasperated at him for consistently ignoring the conventional standards of the time. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Lex Salica*: ed. Hessel. col. 181 sqq.

Sophists were unpopular, not because they corrupted people's morals, but because, as Mr. Bosanquet has said, they showed such abominably bad form in taking money for talking at parties. The reason why Swift's writings were admired and Whitman's abhorred (though Swift's works are really more immoral than Whitman's) was simply that Whitman shocked people's manners while Swift did not.

We do not deny that it is possible to distinguish between manners and other departments of morality. But all the expressions of courtesy fall ultimately within the one realm of morality. The moral life is a unity; and a breach of courtesy, like an offence in any other department of morals, is *ipso facto* a transgression of morality.

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